

## South African Education Crisis

Writing for the SACP's Umsebenzi Online, in August 2012, and seeing a deep crisis, the distinguished South African History Professor, Jeff Guy, began as follows:

*“We are confronted by it daily: the failure of education at every level: attempts to remove the stifling legacy of our educational past brought to nothing by inflexible pedagogies, inadequate teaching, stifling bureaucracy, and inefficient administration all contributing to the waste of the funds and material upon which young peoples' futures depend. In the press, at conferences and workshops, this contemporary crisis is in the public view. Open comment and criticism of this kind are essential attributes of the democratic approach, and will lead, one has to hope, in the direction of radical improvement. But in the past fortnight I have been confronted by another dimension of the crisis in education. While it might appear to be very different I believe it is one that also has its roots in our history, and is as difficult to solve.”*

By writing in the Business Day, Professor Guy had suddenly become exposed to a furious, vindictive barrage of Philistine commentary, the nature of which he describes as: *“ignorance of the great themes in modern history - that is, of the world that*

*has made us and we have made.”*

He goes on: *“the reaction to my article has persuaded me that the crisis concerns not just the educationally disadvantaged, but the advantaged as well.”*

Two things come to mind at once.

First is the confirmation that a general elevation of the educational level of the entire society needs to be contrived, whether in the manner of N F S Grundtvig and the Danish folk-high-schools, or in the manner of the committed intellectuals described by McLaren and Fischman, or in some other way, such as the political education programme envisaged in the “South African Road to Socialism” passed at the 13<sup>th</sup> SACP Congress in Ongoye a month earlier than Guy’s article, in July 2012.

Second is the apparent fact that in the utilitarian rush to *“improve maths, science and technology”*, as President Zuma put it in his State of the Nation Address on 14 February 2013, history has been relegated in schools to the status of an optional subject, of no worth. President Zuma did not even mention history. This is what he said:

*“We welcome the improvement each year in the ANA results, but more must be done to improve maths, science and technology.*

*“The Department of Basic Education will establish a*

*national task team to strengthen the implementation of the Mathematics, Science and Technology Strategy.*

*“We urge the private sector to partner government through establishing, adopting or sponsoring maths and science academies or Saturday schools.”*

So, far from repairing what Professor Guy described as *“ignorance of the great themes in modern history - that is, of the world that has made us and we have made,”* the actual prospect is of even deeper ignorance because of lack of incentive and because of the time being crowded out by the ostensibly market-sanctified trio of *“maths, science and technology”*.

Professor Guy passed away in December, 2014.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Crisis in South African Education, Jeff Guy, Umsebenzi Online, 2012.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)